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SUBJECT: SPECIAL IESC MEETING MARCH 29

Classified By: Economic Minister Counselor Charles P. Ries for reasons
1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih chaired a special session of the Iraq Executive Steering Committee (IESC) in support of Operation Fardh al-Qanoon (FAQ) at his residence March 29. Normally a weekly session held on Fridays, the March 28 session had been cancelled. During this special session, DPM Barham Salih asked for reports on the state of key services in Baghdad, Basra and other areas affected by the ongoing confrontation between ISF and outlaw militias. The assembled group of GOI officials called for unity in the face of the challenges facing their government and a redoubled effort to ensure services are provided to citizens in Basra and Baghdad alike. End summary.

Security situation causing services concerns

¶2. (C) National Security Advisor (NSA) Muwafak al-Rubaie provided a brief overview of the security situation in Baghdad, Basra and other areas currently witnessing conflict between ISF and outlaw militia elements. Baghdad's Sadr City is largely surrounded on the east, west and south by ISF units which, while involved in small arms engagements, have not yet used any heavy weaponry in their operations. (Note. US forces have engaged enemy forces with tank main gun rounds and Hellfire missiles. End note.) Attacks in Mahmoudiya to the south of Baghdad resulted in several ISF casualties. In Shula, a neighborhood adjacent to Kadhamiya, an IP station was overrun, resulting in the capture of IPs and the loss of their uniforms, weapons and vehicles (including humvees). Reports from the southern provincial capital of Nasariya indicated that the situation there is deteriorating and that the Governor there is not cooperating with the central government. Troops and supplies are en route to Basra to support ISF units engaged there. NSA Rubaie said that the GOI must take a hard line on any deserters and work to maintain the morale of the ISF troops. He suggested that all deserters be prosecuted to the full extent of the law and subsequently banned from future service in the ISF.

¶3. (C) MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus reported that the criminal militia elements fighting against the government and attacking the IZ have built up a stockpile of weapons including Iranian-made rockets. Over the past 24 hours, ISF units have generally settled down after an initial period of confusion. The situation in Basra is indeed a confusing and difficult one, GEN Petraeus said, and the GOI must make sure its goals there are achievable. GEN Petraeus wanted to make clear that ongoing operations were not intended to target a specific political party or militia group -- the objective is to contain the situation before the already serious humanitarian concerns become worse.

¶4. (C) Ambassador Crocker said that the current situation is not just a critical test for the government, but also for the people of Iraq; political differences must be set aside to

ensure the future of the nation. DPM Barham Salih agreed and said that as far as he was concerned, there can be no option other than standing up to these armed criminal groups. He then asked for reports from several of the key ministry officials attending the session.

Oil infrastructure prime target for outlaws

15. (C) The Minister of Oil said that oil infrastructure is the top target for militias and that strikes on critical pipelines now average 1 to 3 attacks per day in Basra. The oil flow from Basra saw a slight decrease in the first few days of fighting, but has been restored to its normal flow. The Minister said his workers are used to facing such challenges; he estimates that over the past 12 months a key piece of oil infrastructure in Iraq has been attacked every 36 hours.

16. (C) The key concern for the Minister of Oil is that the curfew has prevented tankers from delivering product to Baghdad. He agreed to coordinate with the BOC on gaining the appropriate permissions for his fleet.

No electricity blackouts expected in Baghdad

17. (C) The Minister of Electricity reported that attacks have damaged several key pieces of the electricity grid in Baghdad, but this should not drastically reduce the power supply in the capital over the next few days. The Ministry is struggling to make sure that the critical oil

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infrastructure of Basra is served by electricity, as well as the many other facilities responsible for the delivery of basic services to the population. The major concern of the Minister is the duration of the current conflict; he suggested that if the situation is anticipated to continue for some time, those in government must be prepared to behave pragmatically, and not just emotionally. Long term plans for maintaining work crews in hazardous situations must be developed.

Provincial government suggests 3 point strategy

18. (C) Baghdad Provincial Council Chairman Mueen al-Khademy assessed the overall situation in Baghdad as mixed. ISF units have regained control in areas such as Mahmoudiya, Kadhamiya and Jusr Diyala, but districts such as Sadr City and 9 Nissan show strong militia presence. He praised the curfew for improving the security situation, but raised concerns about the difficulties imposed on the population when their mobility is limited. So far, the supply of potable water has not been affected by the conflict, the Chairman reported. Electricity supply and sewer system functionality remain normal in the capital. Trash collection has stopped in many areas, and this is a serious health concern, he said. Citizens are becoming concerned with food and fuel supplies. Chairman Mueen suggested the development of a 3 point strategy to cope with the ongoing situation that includes a robust media campaign, political outreach to local citizens and party leaders, and improved security plans.

Health care system showing strain

19. (C) The Minister of Health provided a report of casualties sustained during the ongoing conflict. According to the latest hospital records, Baghdad has seen 850 serious injuries and 127 deaths as a result of the fighting; Basra

has seen 745 injuries and 139 deaths. These numbers represent official hospital registrations and thus may not be inclusive of all casualties, according to the Minister.

¶10. (C) Baghdad's hospitals have remained open and functional, save one in Sadr City, the Minister reported. However the major concern is one of ambulances and the mechanism by which patients having different ailments or injuries are moved quickly and effectively to the correct specialty hospital. The ongoing conflict is putting a strain on the system, and the Minister would like to see some special incentive compensation provided to workers who continue to serve throughout such difficult circumstances. DPM Barham Salih asked the Minister of Finance look into the feasibility of this proposal.

Help is on the way to distressed citizens

¶11. (C) DPM Barham Salih said that the GOI has stores of food and humanitarian supplies located in warehouses in Basra and the security situation is preventing distribution to needy citizens there, and the transport of those goods to needy citizens here in Baghdad. He expressed the need for a coordinated effort to secure and deliver those supplies among Ministry of Trade, ISF, MNF-I and other entities.

¶12. (C) Ambassador Charles Ries, CETI, reported on discussions between Embassy and UNAMI officials. According to UNAMI, the situation in Basra has the potential to become a serious humanitarian crisis. It is critical that the GOI be seen by its people as providing humanitarian assistance there and the UN is willing to assist in that task, Ambassador Ries related.

This crisis is "Not just about Maliki"

¶13. (C) NSA Rubaie admonished his fellow officials to 'redouble their efforts' to prove that the GOI is providing services to the people of Iraq. He challenged several ministers and other politicians for being 'neutral' about the current situation and not clearly coming down on the side of the legitimate government. He declared that the message Iraqis most needed to hear is that this conflict is first and foremost not a conflict with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki -- it is not a conflict with Maliki's government; -- this conflict is a direct threat to the progress and success that the Iraqi people themselves have achieved in the past 5 years. The fate of the nation depends upon our success in resolving this crisis, he said.

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